# **Imtiaz Dharker**

# Six Poems North and South



Six Poems North and South was commissioned by Manchester Literature Festival and Manchester Art Gallery in response to the New North and South programme of exhibitions celebrating the shared heritage of South Asia and the North of England. The work was performed in the galleries on Friday 20th October as part of the 2017 Manchester Literature Festival.

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### The Jump

At last he comes out of his room and his skin is webbed, his face masked

in red, but I can see where he has sewn the pieces of polyester together,

and where he has zipped himself in. When I squeeze this super-hero's arm

he is still my boy inside, nothing but bone.

Come for food, I say, khaman-dhoklas are hot, aunties and uncles are waiting.

But he says, *If somebody told you it was easy to grow another skin, they lied.* 

So we are in the sitting-room, hunger rumbling, the smell of food

calling from the kitchen, watching him jump off the sofa. He is whispering,

Go web! Up, up and away, web! Shazam!

Then, knees bent to his chest, he sails over Bolton,

Leicester, Brent, New York. The carpet becomes a map of the world

and in front of my eyes he is owning this other skin, crossing a line.

He is strange and beautiful, and no longer mine.



## Zikr

This line is the first breath, this dash the last

and here, where the hand moved back and forth, is the pulse

that lives past death and looks like love.



#### The garden gnomes are on their mobile phones

Headphones on, the gnomes will never know the sound

of the common yarrow trying to grow.

The plumbago can hardly hear itself think over passing buses, sirens, drills,

washing machines, tumble-dryers, beeping tills.

The gnomes are online or out at the shops, buying

portable speakers, voice recognition software, high-top sneakers,

not caring if the lobelia is trying to breathe over the harsh kiss

of pesticide and sewage spewed out from factories.

The gnomes are busy watching Game of Thrones,

jamming buttons on controllers, checking their likes on mobile phones.

For the basil, time moves in slow-motion and the gnomes are a passing blur.

The money plant and marigold are in conversation. They remember

a time when there was water nearby and they could sense it,

a time before cars and their fumes, before gnomes.

The world is in the tiny hands of those with cash hidden

under the flower-beds, or stashed in socks.

The garden gnomes are devious. They are singing

lullabies to the unsuspecting phlox.



#### Send this

Do not send me a postcard of the city that once lived here, its water-courses and its domes. No photograph can show that this was once home, and that home is long gone.

Do not send me a miniature drawn with a camel's-hair brush to hang on my wall, or tell me you were in the Anarkali Bazaar, or say the gulmohar trees were aflame and koels sang there.

Everything changes. Remind me of this when the light falls aslant on things not quite made, girders laid over half-drawn plans, haggled over and paid, the truth retold and sold in new-built malls.

With the wrong key, I come to this place and try to unlock it.

Air-conditioners rattle and spit at the back of suburban villas. Someone here has built a room, left space for a window,

opened a door, a desire.
Do not mock it. In an almost-done world, send me this, knowing nothing is ever fixed. I will carry the unfinished walls of my city with me, in my pocket.



#### This line, that thread

Draw a line from finger to heart.

Draw the water from well to mouth.

Place a mark where the words were said,
map the distance from north to south.

Take it apart and start again.

Look out of the window at your neighbour. Look in the mirror at your own face. Breathe on the glass to blur the border, watch it become an unowned space.

Wipe it away and begin again.

Hold the end of a single thread, loop it to others, weave it to lace. Spread it out to see if the holes are an imperfection or a kind of grace

with their open heart, their otherness.



#### Drain

What comes out of this place is rust-coloured water, mountains of scraps tossed away, the after-taste of excess on the tongue, the long squirm of it in the heart, the lurch of too much.

All this should lurk and hide, but it is out there on show like a wedding party with dancers, brass bands, flaunting itself to the world. *This is how much I can afford,* it says, *to throw away.* 

Out with drums pounding, tassels shaking, all the red and gold in the world weighing down the bride till she is on her knees, saying *Please*, but not finishing, exhausted

by the whole thing, by being sold out. Struggling out of cracks are the hands that are too small, not reaching up for help, not reaching, because what is there but air,

and even that used up, drained?